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ABSTRACT

This book of poetic riddles written in Alaskan Athabaskan is intended as supplementary reading for use in a bilingual education setting. The riddles, told as a pastime and as an art about the native culture, were recorded by a 90-year-old Koyukon leader. An English translation is included. (NCF)

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Huslia, Alaska

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K'OOL TSAAH TS'IN'

Go k'adaa gisak yoo yaan' k'aa k'agheedaak ts'uh
gin huyil todiniy ts'in'.

Ts'a hal koon yuh zeeyuh huyineetisleet ts'uh
doogh yaga donla' k'ilodok' oodineedaal ts'in'
yeenslin. Go k'adaa gisak yooyaan' k'aak' agheedaak
ts'uh gin huyil todiniy ts'in' k'adaa.

Go yoogh don hohaa haghodohaghadineeghaltok ts'a
hal k'ooltsaah hahadnee ts'a hal koon go dzaan
kuh yee hal neelts'a k'ahooghaltsaah.

KOYUKON RIDDLES

Because everybody is taking after the white man's way of life, nobody probably will remember this. But I just want to record it because I get lonesome. I'm hoping that someday someone will learn them. This is the way they used to entertain each other a long time ago by riddling each other.

They used to riddle each other around New Year's.

Chief Henry
Huslia, Alaska
1976

dilodzoy

Ts'uhu k'udaa koon dahadnee.

?

"Tlaatsaa k'aaghas-aanaa k'its'a sodiiyitl
ts'idnee dahugh dits'inolyo," hadnee. Dibaa
hootozeel ts'in'. Go ahdin zo huyil hadniy
ts'a hoko nahayoodilzee'. Huts'uhu huhoozee
ta koon "Hakhu" hadnee.

1

6

tl'eeltl'oot doyeega'

Go hal go k'odeet dibaa zokul
hayil eediniyaa ts'in'. Ts'uh yuk
hadnee koonoo.

?

"Tlaatsaa k'aaghas-aanaa yahooohaa yahooohaa,"
hadnee.

2

8

k'idzonul k'uł

?

"Tlaatsaa k'aaghas-aanaa yoo-oo
k'its'a-otsin nilaatlaagha neelti'ool
k'a dik'eet'aa," hadnee.

3

10

hulin doyeega'

?

Tlaatsaa k'aaghas-aanaa yoo-oo
k'its'a-ots'in sakaay ghun
dodilniy k'a dik'idnee.

4

12

kotł

?

Tlaatsaa k'aaghas-aanaa yoo-oo
k'its'a-ots'in tso k'inokaał
k'a dik'eet'aa.

5

14

gaaga doghodla'

?

Tlaatsaa k'aaghas-aanaa hutl'o
taadikin dinaaneekaaan k'a
dik'eet'aa.

6

16

tlaghalbaaya ts'ida'

Nidaats'a zokul k'its'its'a
dahadi~~l~~nee-aa. Go huts'uhu
hoozeeyin koon "hakhu" ahadnee.
Go huts'uhu hadnee ta gheelhee.
Ts'a hai yoogh don hakanaaga
tl'eegho ahooltsol. Doogh eesee
eey nooyoogh gisak yoo hunonl
kanaak hahadnee ts'a gheelhee.

?

Tlaatsaa k'aaghas-aanaa hutl'o
nitsaabaay kugheelin k'a dik'eet'aa.

7

13

k'uydliy diloyula'

?

Tlaatsaa k'aaghas-aana yoo-oo
k'its'a-ots'in neeldidaak'eelyo
k'a dik'eet'aa.

8

20

k'ikin bahutdaadaalee

?

Tlaatsaa k'aaghas-aanaa ada
hodinaaghasikin da hodinaaghasikin.

9

22

kun' tloola'

Yaga hudiltlik da dodaga
gheel eey kun' yineek'idee.

?

Tlaatsaa k'aaghas-aanaa leek
tolil altl'aah k'a dik'it'aan.

10

24

teekon kaa'

?

Tlaatsaa k'aaghas-aanaa k'eey
diloyul k'a dik'eet'aa.

11

26

7

gʰ h dots'in tleek'a

Nooyoogh gʰ h dots'in gheel-ee
iron kok'a k'a dahoot'aa hee.

?

Tlaatsaa k'aaghas-aanaa
tsaabakol k'a dik'eet'aa.

12

23

gaabeeł

?

Tlaatsaa k'aaghas-aanaa tliidon
yints'eelgaats.

13

30

dologhaaltona

(dolohaaghaaltona)

?

Tlaatsaa k'aaghas-aanaa tliidon
yooyeentl'ots'itl-o.

14

32

nutl kin k'a

?

Tlaatsaa k'aaghas-aanaa neelk'aa
taayo eelghaan k'a dik'eet'a.

15

34

k'eey tolusga'

(K'eeytolusga gheel eey
bideets'iy ta yoodilyeesk
k'aadneehee.)

?

Doghon yooyeeskghazoldil.

(Yoogh don lo yoozagheelyeesk.)

16

36

k'inoot baagha

?

Tlaatsaa k'aaghas-aanaa yobaagh
nok'idzeedaadliyo k'a dik'eet'aa.

17

33

neełk'aa hanodzaṇ

doditeeł ts'in'

?

Tlaatsaa k'aaghas-aanaa
yaats'in nots'ah dok'ah^uagha
dineeghusagudza yaats'in
nots'ah dok'ah^uagha dineeghasinaaɩ.

18

40

yoouhap

?

Tlaatsaa k'aaghas-aanaa dibee
da-aakyee neelk'ots'a dots'idlinuts.

19

42

tseetł dodeelnin k'a

Yoogh tseetł dodeelnin k'a

hoolaan k'aant'aa da huloy la-on.

?

Tlaatsaa k'aaghas-aanaa go
neek'aahunaanga-o'.

20

44

deeguy

?

Tlaatsaa k'aaghas-aanaa gaagheeghik,
gaagheeghik.

21

46

dinaa noghaa

?

Tlaatsaa k'aaghas-aanaa neelot
da haak'itl-aytl.

22

43

taateebaay doghoo'

?

Tlaatsaa k'aaghas-aanaa huts'ibaa
dingheelyon k'a dik'eet'aa.
Doogh buhugheeldlaa-aayee.

23

50

diy neeyo hu

?

Tlaatsaa k'aaghas-aanaa
nik'idzooghootna nonok'itishah.

24

52

toonts'oda

?

Tlaatsaa k'aaghas-aanaa taahay
dinaadak'ay yee hats'eedaal.

25

54

noolaagha

?

Tlaatsaa k'aaghas-aanaa
nitlnaatlk'idee ts'eey
yee hats'eedaal.

26

oy bittl

?

Tlaatsaa k'aaghas-aanaa
go koonu go koonu go koonu.

27

58

oy nitok'a

?

Tlaatsaa k'aaghas-aanaa
nontotl naangiditl.

28

60

TRANSLATIONS

1. They would say, "Wait, I see something! Because we don't want to choke on smoke we're hiding our faces." Who is going to figure this out? At least at that time it was their own environment that they used as the basis for their riddles. They would name different things and try to figure them out. If they came close, the one who was riddling them would say, "Hakhu."

ANSWER: A clump of spruce cones curled under.

2. RIDDLE: And then they'd say, "Wait, I see something: twang, twang."

ANSWER: The noise of a bowstring. Of course, nobody knows what a bowstring noise is nowadays. If no one could guess the answer, they'd say "yuk."

3. RIDDLE: Wait, I see something: In the other world it looks like their heads are braided together.

ANSWER: The neck of an American Widgeon duck.

4. RIDDLE: Wait, I see something: It sounds like a lullaby is being sung to children in the other world.

ANSWER: The noise of a fast-moving current.

5. RIDDLE: Wait, I see something: It looks like a cache that's leaning over in the other world.

ANSWER: Salmonberries.

6. RIDDLE: Wait, I see something: At the headwaters it looks like a cache of sticks sticking in the water.

ANSWER: Beaver feed pile.

7. RIDDLE: Wait, I see something: Up at the headwaters it looks like water running over small white fish.

ANSWER: Grayling's coat. They never make mistakes in their answers. And they say "Hakhu" to the one who comes closest to the right answer. I guess it means 'almost'. The old language is hard to understand. I guess that's what the white people call high words.

8. RIDDLE: Wait, I see something: It looks like some animals got their antlers tangled in the other world.

ANSWER: A clump of dry willow branches.

9. RIDDLE: Wait, I see something: I stuboornly stick up in the same stubborn place.

ANSWER: A stump the sled is always bumping.

10. RIDDLE: Wait, I see something: Something is acting like a dog that's lapping up broth.

ANSWER: Fire flaring up and down. You know how when the fire flares up you see flames go way up.

11. RIDDLE: Wait, I see something: Something looks like a birch tree branching.

ANSWER: Wolf tail.

18. RIDDLE: Wait, I see something: My hat is short on one side and long on the other.
- ANSWER: The solstice.
19. RIDDLE: Wait, I see something: We're sitting all puffed up, across from each other, in a sheepskin coat.
- ANSWER: Snow on tree branches.
20. RIDDLE: Wait, I see something: My track ends here.
- ANSWER: The track of a snowball that rolled down a hill.
21. RIDDLE: Wait, I see something: shining silver, shining silver.
- ANSWER: Gray hair.
22. RIDDLE: Wait, I see something: I make something touch far away.
- ANSWER: Our eyesight.
23. RIDDLE: Wait, I see something: It looks like a stand of spruce trees. It's something we don't have around here.
- ANSWER: Whale's whiskers.
24. RIDDLE: Wait, I see something: I'm scratching back and forth across Silver Creek.
- ANSWER: Spruce hen tracks.

12. RIDDLE: Wait, I see something: Something looks like a spoon.

ANSWER: The marking down the center of a rabbit's back. You know how down the center of a rabbit's back his fur looks metallic.

13. RIDDLE: Wait, I see something: We're all staring out from the edge of the bank.

ANSWER: Snares set along the bank.

14. RIDDLE: Wait, I see something: We're all sticking our butts up in the air along the bank.

ANSWER: Spring-pole snares.

15. RIDDLE: Wait, I see something: It looks like oil on water in both directions.

ANSWER: Sleigh runner track.

16. RIDDLE: Wait, I see something: We're whistling along the edge of the bank. (But we never used to whistle a long time ago.)

ANSWER: The wind blowing on a half-detached piece of birchbark. You know how a half-detached piece of birchbark whistles when the wind is blowing against it.

17. RIDDLE: Wait, I see something: It looks like cumulus clouds around the sky.

ANSWER: The fat around the edge of the fourth stomach of a caribou.

25. RIDDLE: Wait, I see something: We're all going up river
in reddish colored boats.

ANSWER: Suckers going up river.

26. RIDDLE: Wait, I see something: We're all going up river
in many-colored boats.

ANSWER: Dog salmon going up river.

27. RIDDLE: Wait, I see something here and there, here and there.

ANSWER: Snowshoe filler filling snowshoes.

28. RIDDLE: Wait, I see something: I'm all wound up across my
forehead.

ANSWER: Binding across the tip of snowshoes.